

12 September 2023 Tuesday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



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## letters

### DENR responds

In the opinion piece written by Mr. Jarius Bondoc and published in *The STAR* on Sept. 8, 2023, he wrote that there are 30 claimants in the Masungi reserve area who have spurious surveys or titles issued by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) officials between 1997 to 2004. He correctly stated that some claimants have built houses and resorts.

As an update for Mr. Bondoc, the DENR began cancelling surveys and initiated reversion proceedings against the 25 title holders in the reserve beginning in 2006. Administrative cases were also filed against erring officials who caused the issuance of the titles. The reversion cases to cancel the titles are now pending with the courts.

Further, the DENR understands that the NBI conducted raids in the resorts unlawfully built in the area. Criminal cases were also filed against the owners of said resorts.

Mr. Bondoc opined that "DENR offers no help to the earth savers, nor care for the yearly floods." Mr. Bondoc appears to be referring to the Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. – with whom the late Secretary Gina Lopez entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in 2017 – as the "earth savers." As correctly pointed out by the author, the said MOA is now at the center of an ongoing congressional investigation.

In response, the DENR believes that no one individual, entity or even agency can successfully protect and conserve a Protected Area, all the more one like the Masungi Reserve area which lies in three different Protected Areas. This view is supported by legislation which established the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) when Congress enacted Republic Act 7586 in 1992. The PAMB is mandated to decide matters relating to planning, peripheral protection and general administration of Protected Areas in accordance with the approved general management strategy.

The members of the PAMB include representatives from the DENR, the provincial and municipal government, the barangay, at least three representatives from NGOs or the local community and from the indigenous peoples, if applicable. All activities inside Protected Areas which may impact the environment should have the clearance of the PAMB.

During the congressional hearings, testimonies were given that Masungi

Georeserve Foundation Inc. did not and does not coordinate with the PAMB – nor with the PAMB's individual members – with regard to their alleged preservation and conservation activities in the Masungi Reserve area. The PAMB has in fact recommended the cancellation of the MOA with Masungi Georeserve Foundation, Inc.

As regards addressing the unfortunate flooding that occurs during typhoons, the DENR has adopted a ridge-to-reef approach to flood management. This applies to the Upper Marikina Watershed, our ridge, as it drains downwards into the floodplains that lead either to Laguna de Bay or Manila Bay. Flooding may occur due to a combination of several factors, including the type of hazards such as extreme rainfall, exposure such as areas that have lost forest or ground cover, or on unregulated commercial, industrial and residential development in floodplains and vulnerabilities such as settlements with inadequate drainage infrastructure and fragile construction.

Three other factors may also bear consideration – soil quality and saturation, the tides and geographic distribution of rainfall. Post-Ondoy studies cited the combination of many of these factors. Significantly, it was the amount of rainfall that fell on Metro Manila itself (343 mm of the total 455 mm in six hours), the narrowing of the urban waterways due to man-made structures and river siltation that paralyzed the city.

Given the complexity of ensuring adequate water supply flood management, the DENR is pleased to share that President Marcos Jr. issued EO 22 which created the Water Resource Management Office (WRMO) and placed it under the DENR. Its mandate is to harmonize all government efforts to ensure availability and sustainable management of water resource in the whole country. While the mitigation measures against flooding still remained with the Department of Public Works and Highways and the local government units, the WRMO is currently coordinating with the DPWH, the DILG and NIA on how existing and proposed flood control infrastructure can be designed not only to prevent flooding but also act as water harvesting and irrigation structures for future use. – **IGNATIUS LOYOLA A. RODRIGUEZ**, Undersecretary for Special Concerns and Legislative Affairs, DENR



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**LETTERS**

**GOV'T SHOULD PROMOTE CULTIVATION OF BAMBOO TO HELP PROTECT CROPS, COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE**

**ENVIRONMENT** Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga called for the planting of more trees to help beat the heat all over. We hasten to add that bamboo would more effectively address the current problem of global warming and climate change, but it is not a tree, as it belongs to the subfamily *Bambusoideae* of the grass family *Poaceae*.

Numerous references, actual proofs, and experiences—including ours as an active advocate of bamboo—attest to the wonder of this grass which can be summed up in one sentence: Bamboo can save the world!

Bamboo is the world's fastest-growing plant, with

certain species attaining full growth in about just a year, compared to trees that take up to several years to mature; gives off 30-35 percent more oxygen and sequesters 10 times or more tons of carbon dioxide than trees. Bamboo can store large amounts of water in its roots and stems, as a reservoir during droughts. The roots protect the soil from landslides and erosion.

Bamboo provides food, medicine, paper, clothing, kitchen utensils, furniture, musical instruments, materials for transportation, houses, and buildings, and can replace wood and cement. Iron bam-

boo, for example, is stronger than steel. Check out more than 1,000 more uses. Unlike trees, bamboo would not be decimated. With judicious harvesting, it keeps growing.

Bamboo would help bring about a sound environment and economy.

However, a big challenge is posed by illegal claimants of watersheds—which are owned by the state, off-limits to human settlements, beyond the commerce of man.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has yet to confront this problem which we have actually encountered in our efforts to

plant bamboo. The stems and shoots from the seedlings we had earlier planted had been uprooted or hacked, and armed men threatened us from proceeding further.

Add to that illegal logging, wanton quarrying, and destructive mining—negating the benefits that bamboo could bring.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) under Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. should also help address this problem which seriously deters the establishment and protection of bamboo plantations. Likewise, the Department of Agriculture (DA) should make good Undersecretary

Deogracias Victor Savellano's announcement that government would help mitigate climate change with the nationwide cultivation of bamboo—a welcome remark as the House of Representatives, where he came from as congressman of the first district of Ilocos Sur, reportedly has not acted for the longest time on the bills promoting the planting and propagation of bamboo.

As for the Department of Agrarian Reform's (DAR) recent move under Secretary Conrado Estrella III to condone all unpaid amortizations of agrarian reform beneficiaries, bamboo planting and cultiva-

tion could greatly help protect the crops of the farmers, add to their income from bamboo, and rehabilitate or enhance their farmlands.

Much more needs to be done for DENR, DILG, DA, and DAR to stand up strong for the state and the people, confront those defying laws and that of nature; and work together—without delay—in all good efforts to pursue this greening mission nationwide.

JOEY C. PAPA AND  
ANA CELIA A. VER-PAPA  
convenors,  
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**ABUSED MARINE, COASTAL RESOURCES**

## GROUP DECRIES UNABATED ILLEGAL FISHING, DESTRUCTION OF MANGROVES IN QUEZON

By **Delfin T. Mallari Jr.**  
@dtmallarijrINQ

LUCENA CITY—An environmentalist group has again sounded the alarm over the unhampered operations of commercial and illegal fishers in the seas off Quezon province that continue to pose as a threat to the marine environment and the source of livelihood of residents in the area.

In an interview on Sunday, Jay Lim, project officer of Tanggol Kalikasan (TK), said illegal fishing in Quezon's waters continued amid efforts of authorities to stop it.

The latest incident occurred on Sept. 9 when the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in Southern Tagalog, together with teams from the Philippine Navy and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources-Fisheries Protection and Law Enforcement, arrested 31 crew members of two purse seine fishing vessels off the coast of Tayabas City that were caught with fish catch with a combined value of about P100 million.

Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla, the PCG-Southern Tagalog district commander, said their combined teams took custody of FV Princess Bernice Carmina, which had 15 crew members on board, and FV Lady Yasmin, along with its 16 crewmen.

Lim claimed that more illegal commercial fishing vessels operate with impunity not only in Tayabas Bay but also in Lamon Bay in the southern part of the province, while dynamite fishing activities have also been the subject of complaints from local fish wardens.

Illegal fishing activities were also being reported almost every day by the Quezon police.

### Fish wardens' woes

The resource-rich Lamon Bay facing the Pacific Ocean covers towns in the southern part of Quezon, while Tayabas Bay encompasses the north-eastern towns of Quezon, the island province of Marinduque and parts of Batangas.

Lim said that the about 100 fish wardens from Quezon's coastal municipalities along Tayabas Bay who took part in TK's workshop last month had decried the rampant illegal fishing, mangrove deforestation and sand quarrying as among many other threats to the marine environment in the province.

Lim said the fish wardens particularly cited dynamite fishing that continued unabated in the two bays despite the danger it posed to the culprits, citing an incident on Aug. 23 when two brothers were injured in a dynamite explosion while fishing in the Polillo Group of Islands in Lamon Bay.

Mangrove forests, also known as the "rainforest of the sea," are an important part of the marine ecosystem, as the roots of the trees provide shelter for marine life while their fallen leaves become feed for fish and other marine animals.

Cutting mangrove trees is banned by Presidential Decree No. 705, or the Forestry Code of the Philippines, and Republic Act No. 8550, otherwise known as the Philippine Fisheries Code. INQ



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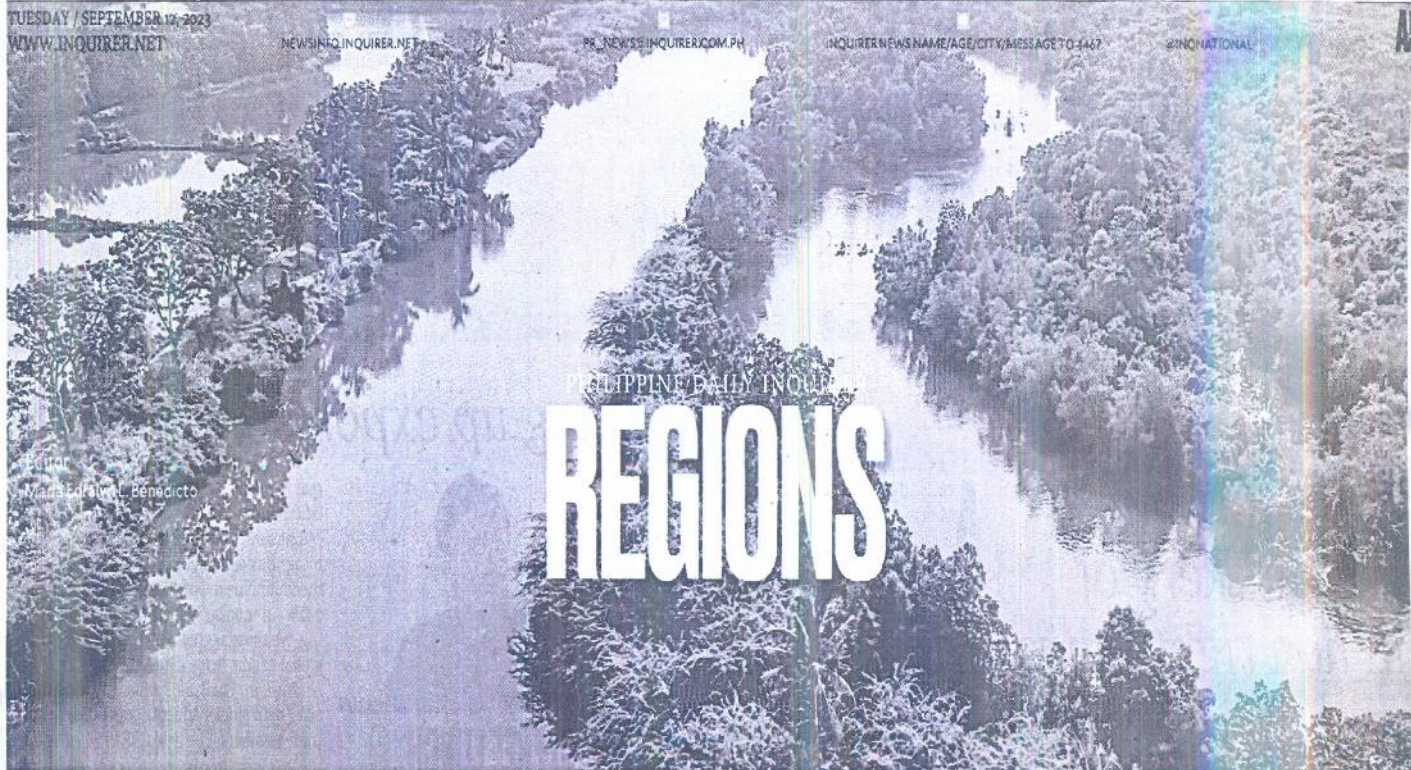
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**THREATENED** The remaining mangrove forest in Lucena City, home to diverse wildlife and plants, is threatened as some residents and businessmen use it for fishponds and charcoal production.  
—DANNY ORDOÑEZ/CONTRIBUTOR



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**DISRUPTION** A fisherman secures his boat along the shores of Manila Bay in Pasay City on Sunday, September 10, 2023. Local fisherfolks are saying they have been affected by the current reclamation project in Manila Bay since dredging ships have disturbed the marine wildlife, which is the source of their livelihood. PHOTO BY J. GERARD SEGUIA



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## Bohol strives to keep 'Global Geopark' title



**BUSINESS  
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ZOILO P. DEJARESCO III

**B**ohol had long decided that Tourism was to be its flagship industry. That it cannot be all things to everyone- like it cannot have too many mining sites in abundance and still preserve its pretty tourist spots.

Bohol's preserving its tourism gems, cultural icons, and historical treasures earned it the respect that UNESCO last year blessed the island province to be the Philippines' only Global Geopark.

Newcomer Governor Aris Aumentado proudly declared before the 34th Travel Mart at the SMX Convention Center last week that Bohol Geopark is not only the 5th largest in the world but already the biggest in the whole of Asia as well.

And the venerable 1,776 Chocolate Hills is a generous part of that citation.

The late governor Rico Aumentado (father of Aris) was so aghast that- back then- DENR continued to grant mining and quarrying permits for the towns of Carmen, Sagbayan, and Batuan ( that house the hills) that he sought and got Capitol jurisdiction over the hills from DENR in 2006.

An earlier 2003 amendment had mandated "regulation of activity even among privately owned areas in between the hills". Yet, up to 2016, we still hear of the complaints about the "rape of the chocolate hills" wherein one hill was demolished for a water project and another for quarrying.

Today the DENR and the PAMB (Protected Area Management Bureau) mandate that "only 20 percent of land mass of a hill considered as a Chocolate Hill may be used or developed in a title lot including the hill".

Today, the provincial Capitol is busy investigating two resorts, namely, the "Captain's Peak" and the "Bud Agta" resorts- (the first one has cottages, a swimming pool with water slides, and a road that leads to the resort)- whether they are in compliance with the "20 Percent Rule".

Environmental purists say the grandeur of Nature's beauty is not enhanced by surrounding the Hershey- chocolate-like hills with water parks, ziplines and the like. Alone, the over a thousand coned hills, are already beautiful by themselves.

Another imperiled UNESCO favorite- is the Danahon Double Barrier Reef, a rare ecological format, that has been slowly fish- depopulated by overfishing (even by dynamite) and the destruction of the coral reefs. It is the richest in coral diversity (500 species representing 75% of the total coral family) but the most endangered.

So threatened it has been, that from 2003-2010, a USAID-funded project "Fish" was implemented for the conservation

of marine life. By September last year, the Bohol Danahon Bank Double Barrier Reef Management Council reacted by forming (with the DENR, BFAR) and about 10 Bohol municipalities to protect 1,800 reef fish species therein.

They include Bien Unido, Buenavista, Clarin, Getafe, Inabanga, Carlos P Garcia, Talibon, Trinidad, Tubigon and Ubay.

And what about Bohol's forest cover which is to help protect people from air pollutant emissions? In 2010, 51 percent of Bohol's land area was covered by forests or 108 hectares but lost 303 hectares of forests by 2022. From 2013 to 2022, Bohol's loss in tree cover involved plantations. People, however, continue to mercilessly cut trees to this day. The Boholanos' collective tree planting activities just cannot keep up with the denudation of greens.

Recently, Shell Petroleum and ForestView Realty were asked to plant 4,000 trees by the city Legislature (as recommended by the DENR).

Well and good. But how about the hundreds of illegal tree-cutters now that still get away with deforestation with wanton abandon?

Finally, Bohol's fabulous diving sites starting with the Balingcasag area have been slowly destroyed by too many divers, especially before the pandemic when the 5 diving sites on that island had 500 dives each day. Too many human diving activities result in unwanted chemicals being dumped, sand being disturbed, and resulting in fatally covering the corals and causing their destruction by the divers' pesky touching and kicking.

The interlude of diving during the pandemic was the only reason that marine life has been slowly resuscitated in the Balingcasag diving area. It is a good thing that the Panglao Divers Association (PADO) has also henceforth limited it to 60 dives per site today or 300 dives in total.

For good measure, an outfit of the Philippine Coast Guard has also been set up on the island.

The reef along beautiful Anda town stretching to Guindulman with 30 varied diving sites show a lot of promise and so are five other coastal municipalities with diving potential. They have been told to act in concert before they go Balingcasag's way in terms of fish and coral destruction. Or destroy exactly what divers are looking for.

The moves above summarize Bohol's quick response to the clear and present danger that threatens the intrinsic components of its being a UNESCO Geopark. The residents recognize that for far too long greed and pure hedonism have been allowed to make man unduly take advantage of nature's gems to their future- perhaps fatal- detriment.

*(Bingo Dejaresco, a former banker, is a financial consultant and media practitioner. He is a Life and Media member of Finex. His views here, however, are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of Finex. Dejarescobingo@yahoo.com)*



## editorial

# China's radioactive dust an environmental horror

**J**APAN started releasing treated radioactive wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean on August 24, 2023. Following the controversial discharge of the wastewater, China right away banned seafood from Japan.

In a September 7, 2023 edition of *Lei's Real Talk* on YouTube—*A radioactive "pandemic" rising?*—Lei, the host, said nuclear radiation detectors are selling like hotcakes in China. "Sales surged 232 percent in less than a week. Now they were sold out, and on back order. This is because Beijing has stirred up a national publicity campaign over the release of treated Fukushima water."

It turned out that the Geiger counters, or nuclear radiation measuring devices, were needed by millions of Chinese citizens concerned about the risk of being exposed to radiation, not from Japan but from Inner Mongolia, which is about 500 kilometers away from Beijing.

In the capital city of Inner Mongolia, Hohhot (Huhehaote), people have been lining up in hospitals to be treated for asthma-like symptoms. China Central Television (CCTV) reported that on the night of September 2, there was a sudden surge of asthma cases in the city after a thunderstorm. The report quoted the Deputy Director of the Pediatric Department at the Inner Mongolia Medical University Hospital as saying "we admitted more than 400 children."

Dr. Li-Meng Yan, a scientist who worked at the Hong Kong School of Public Health, posted on X: "There is a large-scale radioactive material leakage from a mine near Ordos city of Inner Mongolia. Since September 2, numerous people got radiation injuries, especially acute respiratory injuries. According to our exclusive sources in CCP's Central Military Commission and Ministry of Emergency, the radioactive materials were mined by PLA's Armed Police to make dirty bombs. Armed Police thought they have mined all the radioactive materials, so they abandoned the place. Then PLA sold the concession of the coalmine to some business owners. Recently they mined it in the open air, so the radioactive materials were spread by convectional rainfall." The official Chinese Communist Party (CCP) media gave the disease a name—"Thunderstorm asthma." They said it was caused by the Artemisia plant, which allegedly has a high pollen concentration in August to September. But people wonder, Inner Mongolia always has had this type of plant, so why is this year particularly bad.

On September 4, some Chinese social media posts said people in Inner Mongolia have been exposed to radioactive uranium, like those used in nuclear plants, and the uranium has been reportedly excavated from a local coalmine. This is where the radioactive dust particles inhaled by people reportedly came from.

The CCP has reportedly deployed its Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Regiment to manage the emergency.

Dr. Yan added: "There is no official registration of the radioactive mine. Based on classified report from our sources in Ministry of Emergency Management, the radioactive coalmine is in Shiguai district of Baotou, Inner Mongolia have been exposed to radioactive uranium, like those used in nuclear plants, and the uranium has been reportedly excavated from a local coalmine. This is where the radioactive dust particles inhaled by people reportedly came from.

The CCP has reportedly deployed its Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Regiment to manage the emergency.

Dr. Yan added: "There is no official registration of the radioactive mine. Based on classified report from our sources in Ministry of Emergency Management, the radioactive coalmine is in Shiguai district of Baotou, Inner Mongolia. Based on official data, radiation dose around the coal stockpiles is over one millisievert [mSv] per hour. The annual limit for radiation exposure for a member of the public is one mSv per annum. The government is still covering up the leakage. Currently, there are patients of such respiratory radiation injuries in Tianjin and Beijing. But the government insists on "Thunderstorm asthma related to plants," claiming it would last for another two to three weeks."

Open pit mining activities in the area started on August 20, 2023. A few days later, something bizarre happened. Two haul truck drivers suddenly developed ulcers all over their bodies, and passed brown urine. Sexually transmitted disease was the initial suspicion, but later, they were sent to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, where they died. China's CDC discovered they had radiation infection and reported the case to higher authorities. The two drivers were buried in lead-lined coffins. The Ministry of Emergency Management traced the source of the radiation back to the open piles of coal in the Ordos coalmine. Unfortunately, all but a negligible quantity of the newly mined coals have already been shipped to other coal yards and thermal power plants across China. So it was difficult to track where all the coal went. At this point, the Ministry of Emergency Management requested the People's Liberation Army to help. Until now, Lei said this information is not being shared with the public.





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## Phivolcs: Taal still under Alert Level 1

Taal Volcano in Batangas remains under Alert Level 1 despite showing heightened activity recently, state volcanologists said yesterday.

"Taal Volcano has been under Alert Level 1 since July 2022. As of 5 a.m. yesterday to 5 a.m. today, no volcanic earthquake was recorded, but there was a voluminous activity of at least 2,400 meters yesterday. On Sept. 9, the sulfur dioxide emission reached 2,371," Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) director Teresito Bacolcol said at the Laging Handa briefing.

Bacolcol said among the parameters to be considered in upgrading or lowering the alert level is the number of earthquakes.

"Since yesterday, we have not recorded an earthquake. This is in contrast to the six volcanic tremors that we recorded between Sept. 9 and 10," he said.

He warned residents against exposure to volcanic smog, which can irritate the eyes, throat and respiratory tract.

"The severity would depend on the gas concentration and the duration of exposure. Particularly sensitive to smog are those with health conditions such as asthma, lung and heart diseases," Bacolcol said.

- Bella Cariaso



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## Cloudy skies expected in extreme northern Luzon

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said on Monday, Sept. 11 that there is a high chance of cloudy skies with thunderstorms in extreme Northern Luzon due to the low-pressure area (LPA) extension, while scattered rain showers, lightning, and thunder are expected in the rest of Luzon.

Weather specialist Obet Badrina said PAGASA was still monitoring two LPAs inside and outside the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) which both have low chances of developing into tropic cyclone.

The LPA inside the PAR was last seen 875 kilometers East Northeast of Extreme Northern Luzon. The LPA outside PAR, meanwhile, was last observed at 1,960

kilometer East Northeast of Eastern Visayas.

"Pareho nating hindi inaasahang maging bagyo or maliit 'yung tyansang maging bagyo itong dalawang low pressure area na ito. (Both of these low pressure areas are not expected or they have low chance to develop into tropical cyclone)," Badrina said.

High chance of cloudy skies with rain showers in mentioned areas is expected while the rest of Luzon may experience humid weather until noon and scattered rains with thunder and lightning at night.

Badrina also said that the LPA outside PAR strengthens the southwest monsoon particularly in Mindanao wherein cloudy skies with high chance of rain showers is expected specifically in Zamboanga Peninsula. (Lizst Torres Abello)